

Miller-Aaron House
704 D Street
Marysville, Yuba County
California

HABS No. CAL-1113

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Planning and Service Center, Design and Construction
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PHOTOGRAPH-DATA BOOK REPORT
HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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MILLER-AARON HOUSE

Marysville, Yuba County, California

ADDRESS: 704 D Street
OWNER: City of Marysville
OCCUPANT: Mary Aaron Museum
USE: Museum

ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Miller-Aaron House (Mary Aaron Museum) is one of the oldest brick structures in Marysville. It dates from the mid-1850's, and was constructed by Warren P. Miller as a private house. The enchanting "mousetrap" Gothic styling of the little two-storied building is echoed more ambitiously in Miller's Yuba County Courthouse, Marysville. On an 80 x 160 foot city lot, this 40 x 40 foot house cost Miller about \$5000 to build. W. H. Aaron, an assayer of gold and silver and native of England, bought the property about 1868. W. H. Aaron married Mary Bobo. From their union came one son, Frank, who lived in the old family house until his marriage. At his death in 1953, the Aaron house, with use of the interest from a trust fund of \$100,000 for maintenance, etc., was given to the City of Marysville. It is a period museum of Yuba County and Marysville, now named in honor of Mary Aaron, and open to the public. The Mary Aaron Museum Association has been responsible for restoration, as well as, supervision of present changes and exhibitions.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Marysville was a major focus of economic and social life for this area of northern California, from the Gold Rush on. Founded by

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Charles Covillaud, purchaser of the site from Theodor Cordua (who had leased it from Captain John A. Sutter), the town was laid out by Alphonse Leplongeon - later an eminent archeologist in Central America. Originally called Yubaville, it was renamed in honor of Mary Murphy, Charles Covillaud's wife. At first, like most towns of the period, it was a modest collection of fabric and frame buildings. Gradually, brick structures began to dot the flat area, with its regular grid pattern of streets, near the junction of the Feather and Yuba Rivers. By 1854, there were a considerable number of these brick public and private buildings. Colville's Marysville Directory for 1855, p. XIX lists: "1854. Owned and occupied by J. D. Laird; 2 stories high; castellated architecture; \$3000." This was apparently a house at 104 Third Street; but it sounds very much like the Miller-Aaron house. In G. and O. Amy's Marysville Directory for 1856 (-1857) p. 15, lists "1855. Warren P. Miller cor. D and Seventh Streets - 40 x 40, 2 stories; value \$5000." In the same Directory, p. 66, there is a reference to "Miller, W. B., Architect and Contractor, dwl cor D and Seventh."¹ W. H. Aaron, assayer of gold and silver and native of England, purchased the property about 1868. He and his wife, Mary Bobo, lived in the house until each died. Their son, Frank, also dwelled in the house until his marriage. He then went to the Rideout house, and later moved it next to his mother's home. At Frank Aaron's death in 1953 the Aaron house was willed to the City of Marysville with the interest from a \$100,000 trust fund to ensure proper maintenance, etc.

The Mary Aaron Museum Association has tastefully added to and re-decorated the house as a memorial to Mary Aaron. It now serves as historical museum of Yuba County, and specifically of Marysville, with period furniture and numerous objects having associational value for the area. The interest from the Frank Aaron Trust Fund covers most essentials. Special projects or additions are handled by the Mary Aaron Memorial Museum Association - which has been instrumental in making the building such a vital historical center.

Note to Historical Information

1. The 1858-59 Directory, p. 68, lists: "Miller, W. P. architect, res cor D and Seventh; N.Y." Thus it seems likely that the mention of W. B. Miller was a typographical error for W. P. Miller, a native

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of New York State. Like many of his contemporaries, Miller was basically a skilled carpenter-contractor who received the title of architect. He was the builder of the Victorian Gothic Yuba County Courthouse, also in brick, D and Sixth Streets.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS AND SOURCES

Coast and Valley Towns of Early California. No. 7: Marysville (view of 1856), with text by Earl Ramey. San Francisco, Book Club of California, July, 1938.

Directories, of Marysville, California. Colville's Marysville Directory for 1855, San Francisco, Monson and Valentine, 1855; G. and O. Amy's Marysville Directory for 1856 (1857-on cover - commencing year 1856), San Francisco, Monson and Valentin, 1856, etc.

Ellis, W. T., Memories, Eugene, University of Oregon Press, 1939.

Miller, Susan. Welcome to the Mary Aaron Museum and the City of Marysville. Paper submitted to Art 1888, University of California, Davis, January 10, 1962. (including personal interviews)

Ramey, Earl, "Beginnings of Marysville," California Historical Society Quarterly, Vol. 14:3-4, Vol. 15:1, 1935.

McDougal, Mrs. Frances, Various mimeographed sheets about the general history of the house and the Mary Aaron Memorial Association - available at the museum.

Yuba County Courthouse records, Marysville, California

ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The Aaron museum is a building of brick(probably locally made), with redwood trim; the exterior has been painted gray, which tends to unify the two materials into a medievalizing stone color. The effect of the building, though modest, is of a Gothic castellated structure; indeed it qualifies better than Strawberry Hill of Walpole for the derisive title of a "Gothic mousetrap." The roof line bristles with lofty parapet of wood, mimicking medieval crenelation, punctuated

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with high crocketed finials. (Since all of this is executed in wood, there is a more attenuated, high profile to details than might have been the case in stone, as seen in actual medieval buildings.) Use of this kind of formidable roof cresting on domestic architecture is rare in the Victorian Gothic period; one can only surmise that Warren P. Miller decided to make his home as impressive as the nearby County Courthouse he designed.

Window openings are either round-headed or culminate in depressed Tudor arches, with hood-molds above, to reinforce their shape. At the second level on east and south are wood balconied windows - the eastern one being framed in a trellis which aids in making this area even more bristling. Just under the arched headings of the first level windows are cusped details which imitate the multi-lobed or cusped arch of Moorish architecture. Reinforcing the rhythm of windows and adding a rather naive impregnability to this cottage are pier buttresses, which continue at the roof line in finials mentioned earlier. Most of the windows originally had louvered shades of wood; some of these have been removed.

The principal entrance is at the southeast. At this southeastern corner and at the southwestern corner were slender pillared porches, with more flattened Tudor-like arches (of wood) between pillars and porch roof. Recently the western side of the house was modified by the removal of the southwest porch and a louvered wooden addition at the west. This area now has a rear entry, enclosed in a modern pastiche of Gothicism (windows and iron grills from the now demolished Yuba County Courthouse). Clifford Couly, Jr. was the architect.

INTERIOR

The interior is substantially as it was, in plan and decor. However, it is definitely a museum of the Marysville area, and although the basic approach is Victorian, most of the actual furniture and objects are not from the Aaron family. On the first floor are a parlor (on the south, with slanted bay at south side), dining room (at the north east) and kitchen (at the north), in addition to the entry hall and staircase. At the southwest, the exterior revision of a former porch has added interior space at this point. A "new" old back stair ascends at the west. The second floor had two bedrooms, a nursery and bath. This awaits more effective restoration and revision for the present museum needs of the building.